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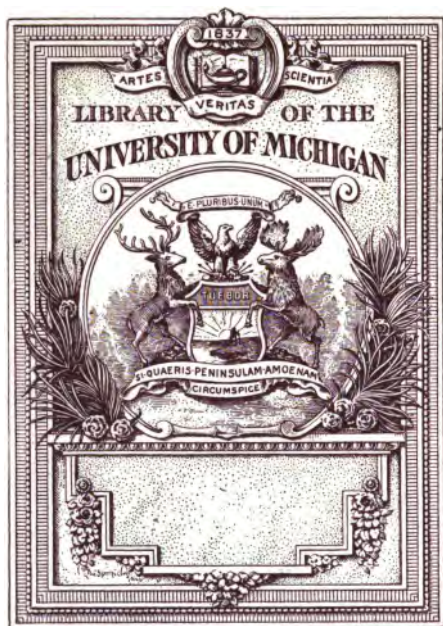
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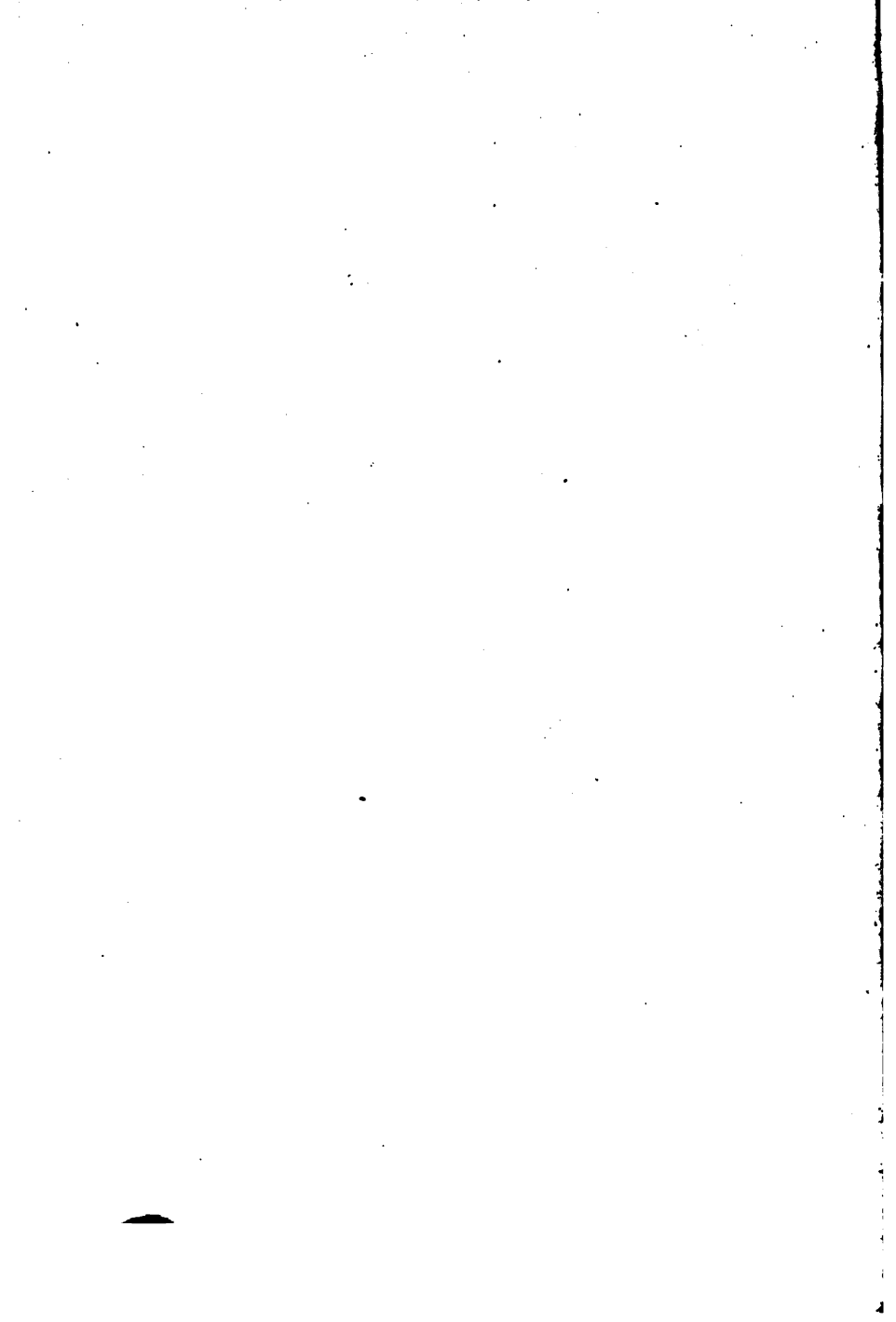
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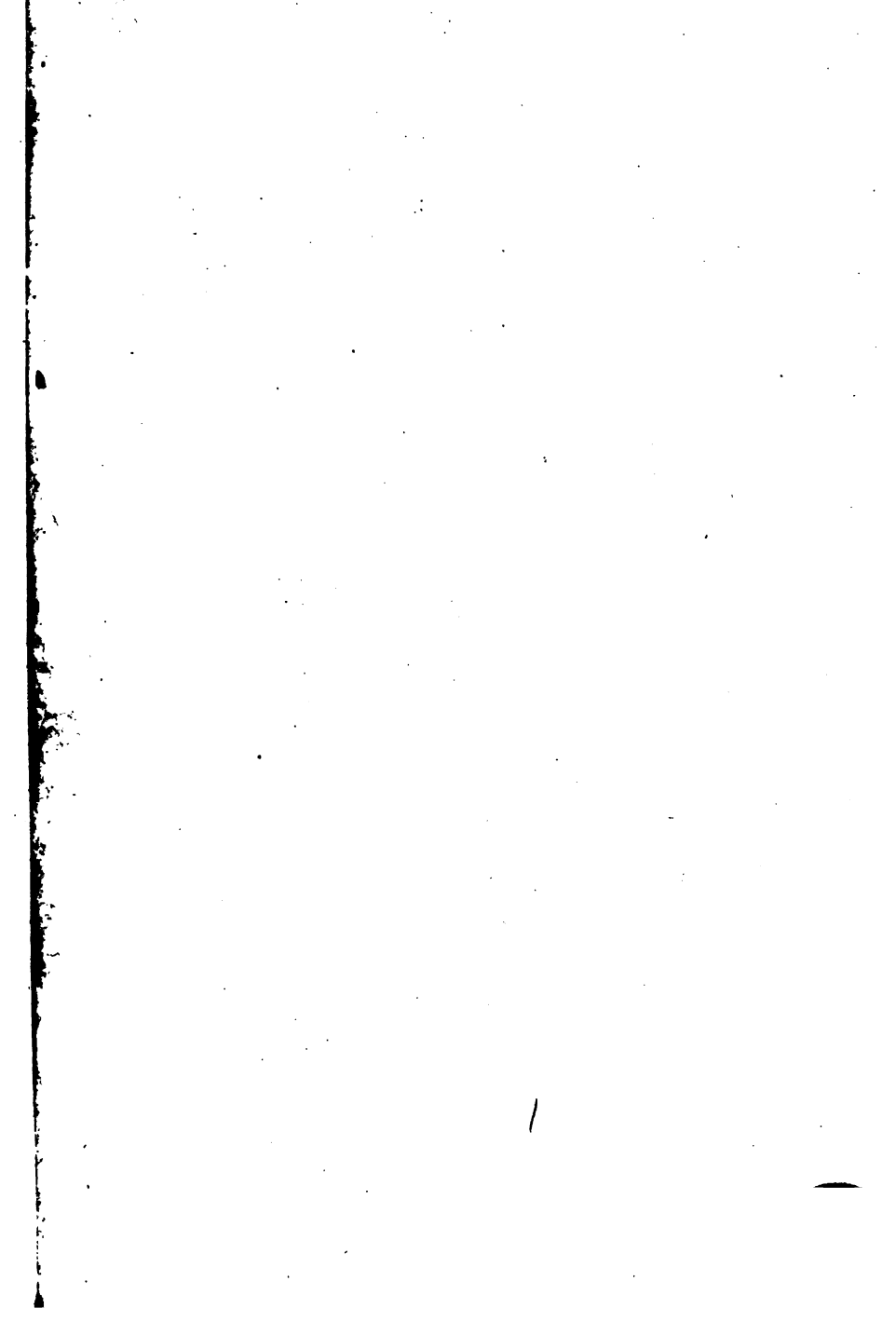
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# THEKLA

## *A Drama*

BY

AILEEN CLEVELAND HIGGINS



BOSTON

**The Poet Lore Company,**  
Publishers  
MCMVII

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TO T. U.



## CHARACTERS

THEKLA, of a noble family in Iconium.

THEOKLEIA, her mother.

PAUL, the Apostle.

DEMAS,                    }  
HERMOGENES,        } false friends of Paul.

ONESIPHORUS, citizen of Iconium, and Paul's  
host.

LECTRA, his wife.

MAIA, his daughter.

ZENO, chief magistrate of Iconium.

CASTELIUS, governor.

CLAUDIUS, the emperor.

ALEXANDER, high priest and *agonothetes*, or  
president of the festival in Antioch

QUEEN TRYPHAENA, relative of Claudius.

POLYBIUS }  
POSIDES,    } attendants of Alexander.

Other attendants, nobles, spectators at the  
festival, slaves.



# THEKLA

## ACT I

*Scene I. Iconium. A. D. 50. The upper chamber of Thekla's luxurious home at Iconium. On the left side, the garden, fresh with spring budding. On the right side of the chamber, the house of Onesiphorous, where the Apostle Paul is the guest, meeting hour after hour, in his room opposite Thekla's window, those eager to hear his divine messages. It is night. In the garden, Thamyris, Thekla's lover, waits, as he has waited many nights, for her to place her love-lamp in the window,—the Oriental signal that the maiden is ready to be wooed and won by him who seeks her. In her darkened chamber Thekla is alone; with hands that flutter in and out like winged creatures, half in fright, she draws her lattice screen; then with a quick-caught breath, she sinks upon the grass-woven mat beside her window, and leans all trembling in the hush, to watch the shadows at the end of the garden where she knows Thamyris watches each night. The moon sends seeking gleams that shine upon the buds braided in her hair; as if revealed in human sight, with a sudden flush she hides her face in the silk-wrapped folds upon her breast. As a bat beats widespread wings in late circling, Thekla starts and listens — then draws farther back in the shadow of the chamber. There is a prescient hush. Thamyris slowly draws nearer and stands beneath her window. Then from the still damp garden close comes Thekla's name in wooer's pleading.)*



## THEKLA

*Thamyris*

Ah, Thekla, open now your lattice-screen,  
 And set the love-lamp in its place to send  
 Its signal to me here within the close  
 Of this, your garden, where the plants and vines  
 That your caress has brought to pink-tipped bud,  
 Around me cast the spell of your white soul.  
 Long have I waited for the hour when I  
 Shall see a shy rose-glow shine through the dark  
 Of brooding night — a signalling that I  
 May speak my love at last — sweet beckon that  
 Invites and bids me come — love's message that  
 You yield, — you lean to list to wooer's song —  
 New melody which speaks your name — a song  
 Long sung a-hush within my heart. Ah, love,  
 Keep me no longer here in silence bound.  
 I wait, loved maid, — I wait.

*(Thekla draws away from the window and makes no answer. There is a long interrogating silence. Enter Theokleia, from the corridor where she has been standing, in hearing of Thamyris's pleading.)*

*Theokleia*

My child, why sit  
 You silent here, in dark and solitude?

*Thekla*

⋮ I am alone, yet not alone,  
 ⋮  
 ⋮

## THEKLA

9

*Theokleia*

Ah, then,

Within the garden Thamyris awaits,  
As he has long awaited, eve on eve,  
The gleaming of your love-lamp. All too long  
Have you withstood him, Thekla,— and indeed  
'Twere travesty of shyness longer, child,  
To keep back now the message that will bring  
The noblest youth in all Iconium  
To plead in adoration at your feet.  
None honored as young Thamyris — not one  
So sought and banqueted as he, and none  
Accounted such great wealth; with all this, too,  
He has much learning — and beside his wit,  
So trenchant in its turn, all other jest  
Seems but the tinselled effort of a fool.  
Who is it first in all the games which try  
The strength of muscles' skill? And who beside  
All other nobles looks a very god  
Incarnate in man's mold? 'Tis he who fain  
Would wed you, child. What want you more?

*Thekla*

I find

In Thamyris no fault — and yet, I know  
Not why — a nameless something stays my hand.  
I cannot light my love-lamp for him yet.

*Theokleia*

Ah, come—what time like now to yield when all

The spring breathes possibilities of love ?  
 The scarlet buds, close sheathed in pale leaf-green  
 Beneath your window, hold the nectary  
 Of a fulfilment sweet. The whisper song  
 Of birds, the fragrance of the pulsing earth,  
 The rush of sap, the blue that freshens skies  
 So lately winter-gray, the clearer light,  
 The first warm winds, — what does all nature tell  
 To you this wondrous night of stars in spring ?  
 Come, — never were you fairer, child, with buds  
 Of white pearled crown-like in your hair, —  
 That shining scarf of rainbow hue close-wrapped  
 About your breast, — your eyes like early dawn.  
 Ah, cloister not your beauty longer here!  
 A face like yours was made to give delight  
 To many eyes.

*Thekla*

What matters it, in truth,  
 My mother, how a face be fashioned, or  
 Who may behold ?

*Theokleia*

Such words are strange upon  
 So fair a maiden's lips. In woman's heart  
 The love of beauty's power ever lives,  
 In you it sleeps, made dormant by the life  
 You lead alone and uncompanioned here  
 Apart from men and other maiden who,  
 With dance and jest, would soon enliven you.  
 When once it is revealed to you that for



A woman's smile a man may lay his sword  
Of battle down, — how an averted glance  
May make him more afraid than angered gods, —  
How for a light caprice his life is risked  
In bridgeless flood of yon Orontes, — then  
Will you awake to glory born in you  
By your great beauty's regal sway.

*Thekla*

Nay, nay —  
Not such a power should I ever wish  
To wield.

*Theokleia*

You speak, my child, as one without  
The walls hears not the music of the feast,  
And, knowing nothing of its charm to stir  
The pulse and to awaken laughter, turns  
Uncaring from the gate. This power is  
Your birthright — I, child, gave it you. In youth  
My beauty led all men as yours shall lead  
When they behold.

*Thekla*

For this — for *this*,  
Is woman born into the world? And is  
There nothing higher for our womanhood  
Than this?

*Theokleia*

I understand you, Thekla, — yes.  
Oft have I seen the mother instinct leap  
Into your eyes when you have held some bird  
That hovered wounded in your gentle hand, —  
When you have stooped with quick response to  
smile  
In children's faces lifted to your own, —  
When you have laid your soothing touch upon  
The sick who in their pain turn first to you,  
With this maternal tenderness of yours,  
Sometimes it must be that you long for ties  
That bring the gifts of motherhood.

*Thekla*

Ah — I  
Would mother not my own in selfish love,  
But children of the world who need me more.  
My mother, there has come a change in me —  
I know not what — and words are clumsy things  
To half explain my thoughts so newly roused.  
My whole perception has been touched and changed  
By sensitiveness new and strange, that finds  
Interpretation of the universe  
Unlike the teachings of my race. At night  
The wind cries out with voices that before  
I have not heard — they cry and moan and call  
Insistently for aid. A crumb of bread  
Flung to the hungry birds flocked round seems now  
Significant of all the world's great need, —

Unnoticed and but scantily helped. The lights  
Of early stars seem vigils set against  
The ever lurking dark. This all creates  
A strange unrest in me — a groping doubt  
Of what in life is worth the strife — a vague  
And haunting wonder what utility  
My own existence serves — a question grave  
Of very right to be. I know not why  
But I am not at one with self.

*Theokleia*

What train  
Of morbid fancy can this be? You speak  
The vagaries of one too much alone.  
But light your lamp and all the world  
Will take a guise most wonderful, — new ties  
Will ground your floating phantasies and make  
Existence full of new delights.

*Thekla* .

Ah, but  
The very making of these earthly ties  
May but undo my highest usefulness.  
A wife — I could not have each day to give,  
With free, glad joy, — a rounded glowing whole  
In its entirety, — a sacrifice,  
Well spent in helpful service to the world.  
Instead, would love and duty riddle time  
Into fine fractions by routine of house  
And loved one's care. My whole life then would be

In endless trifles dissipated — spent  
In narrow circles of my household loves.  
Is it not better, mother, then to keep  
The spirit free from earthly ties that one  
May serve in human usefulness? To keep  
In chastity the flesh, so live unchained  
To earth? He who conforms with worldly things  
Must lose his own identity in spheres  
Of higher life, wrought pure by sacrifice.

*Theokleia*

'Tis plain that you have listened to the words  
Of foreign teaching, which a man named Paul,  
Who is the guest of Onesiphorous,  
Speaks hourly in the chamber opposite.  
He has no message for our race. He speaks  
A doctrine false and artful. His appeal  
Is not for you. Hear him no more. His craft  
Has led your reasoning astray. Your youth  
Perverts your judgment, but with older mind,  
I see how all unworthy is this man.

*Thekla*

But Onesiphorous and Lectra too,  
With all their friends and many strangers, sit  
To hear what this apostle has to say.

*Theokleia*

'Tis but the sorcery, the subtle art

Of some magician practised, child, — no more, —  
This power that he uses to entice.  
You know that Onesiphorous has long  
Been changing follower of strange beliefs —  
So has he made himself an alien  
To us. What leadership has such a one? —  
To-day he listens with his friends to Paul,  
His guest — another day and some new thought  
From mouth of greater fool will catch the ear  
Of Onesiphorous and hold him rapt.  
Do you presume to place your judgment then  
Above your mother's word? Have you forgot  
You owe obedience?

*Thekla*

Forgive me, pray,  
My mother. You are wiser far than I.  
Forbid that I should question what you know  
To be the wisest course. I am your child --  
You know what life is best for me to live.  
O mother, never have I felt as now,  
The need of counsel — for at this, the turn  
From my young girlhood to my womanhood,  
I am bewildered. Let me take your hand  
In mine for I am sore afraid.

*Theokleia*

You are  
But overwrought — come, rest here on my arm  
As when a little child in doubt. What — tears?  
weet bud, affrighted to unfold into

A world of strange new joy. These tears are but  
The heralders of laughter soon to be.  
I leave you now that you may be alone  
To light your lamp.

*Thekla*

Nay, mother, stay — oh, stay,—

*Theokleia*

When first a maiden lights her lamp, she must  
Be quite alone — that hour is hallowed by  
The gods. May blessings rest upon your flame  
Of love. Now let your light burn quickly forth.

*Thekla*

I shall obey your will.

*Theokleia leaves Thekla in her chamber alone. With timid maiden grace and downcast eyes Thekla quickly lights her love-lamp. As she sets it upon the window ledge, the voice of Paul rings out suddenly from the chamber opposite. Waveringly Thekla half screens the light with her hand and listens. Paul's words spoken in the house of Onesiphorous to eager listeners:*

Hear, listeners—

Thrice blessed are the pure in heart, for they  
Shall see their God; and blessed are the few

Who hold the flesh quite chaste, for they shall keep  
Themselves the temples of their Holy God.  
Then blessed are the strong that have control  
Of self, for God shall speak with them apart;  
And blessed are the virgins who shall keep  
The vow of their virginity — such ones  
Shall all receive rewards of chastity —  
The words of God shall certainly become  
To them a light of great salvation, placed  
Against the day of His own perfect Son.  
Thrice blessed are the followers, that through  
The love of Christ have come out boldly from  
Conformity with worldly laws, — these few  
Shall judge the angels. They shall sit at God's  
Right hand.

*Thekla*

It is a message unto me.  
Some high authority that sweeps away  
All counsel of my mother, now compels  
My heed. I must obey — I cannot let  
My love-lamp shine.  
(*She extinguishes her lamp.*)

*Scene II. (Thekla's garden. Three nights after the first scene. Theokleia goes to speak to Thamyris, where he waits at the far end of the garden.)*

*Theokleia*

Strange tale I have to tell, —  
For, Thamyris, three days and nights beside  
Her window has my daughter sat without  
Sufficient food or drink, intent upon  
The words of Paul, the foreigner. She hears  
With rapt and earnest face his long discourse  
Upon virginity and prayer, nor will  
She listen to persuasion or reproof.  
This man has robbed you of your Thekla thus;  
His artful doctrine has around her cast  
Some strange, dark magic spell.

*Thamyris*

It cannot be  
That Thekla has withdrawn herself from me.  
Three nights ago, I saw that one brief flash  
Of Thekla's love-lamp, and the hope it gave  
Still animates my spirit with wild joy!  
It was enough to tell me — though she wills  
I must still longer wait, I may return,  
Each night, expectant of the final sign,  
Which she has thus foretold.



*Theokleia*

Not so — not so.  
As Thekla screened her lamp that night, she turned  
To listen to this stranger's words again.  
All overpowered she became, and then,  
Extinguishing the light, she threw herself  
With great emotion and much eagerness  
Upon her knees, beside the window there  
Just opposite that upper chamber where  
The guest of Onesiphorous beguiles  
The weak Iconians. She heeds not tears,  
Nor looks upon the shrine to Artemis.  
Through this apostle's teachings you have lost  
Your Thekla's love.

*Thamyris*

You can deceive me not.  
Perchance you will that Thekla now should change  
Her favor and for crafty Silas or  
Some other suitor let her love-lamp shine.  
Enrage me not with subterfuge. Speak truth,  
Or may the gods lay curse upon your house.

*Theokleia*

Let cool your wrath — I speak the truth.

*Thamyris*

I will  
Believe it not. From Thekla, whose pure lips

Know not the way to frame untruth, the tale  
Must come.

*(Thamyris goes beneath Thekla's window and calls  
softly to her.)*

'Tis I, I, Thekla — Thamyris.  
I wait here anxiously to learn from you,  
That this strange story which your mother tells  
Is not the truth. One word — dispel my doubt.

*(There is no answer.)*

O Thekla, Thekla, is it this strange spell  
That holds you silent and apart from me ?  
Then meant the glimmer of your love-lamp naught ?  
One word — for I am mad with baffled hope.  
Speak, — speak — or by your silence must I know  
This tale is true.

*(Thekla gives no answer, and after a long, futile  
waiting Thamyris returns to Theokleia.)*

I must believe what you  
Have told this night to me, for Thekla gives  
No answering denial to my cry.  
So soon my April-bud of joy is dead.  
The gods look darkly on the one desire  
That flames my heart. Who is this man named  
Paul,  
Who wrought such change in Thekla's mind ?

*Theokleia*

Since fall  
Has he been dwelling in Iconium.

His work has been insidious and sure.  
No god like his has ever been set forth  
Before our people here. Accustomed as  
We are to rise of deities brought here  
From other lands, indifferent we look  
Upon the worship given each new God.  
What harm does Isis work? The growth of each  
New superstition only ends, in truth,  
To wider worship of our Artemis.  
No innovation of religious faith  
Has stirred our basis of society  
Before. This Paul will overturn all law  
Within our city. All established rule  
Of ordered system will be broken down,  
For those who go to listen to this man,  
Take vows of chastity and sacrifice  
That soon will loose the hold of family  
And social ties which closely bind our race.  
It is unlawful thus to interfere  
With our fixed habits and for this must Paul,  
Magician and enchanter that he is,  
Be made to answer ere another sun  
Shall burn the gray of dusk.

*Thamyris*

None abler than  
One Thamyris to give this man his due!

*Theokleia*

Well said — but how? Stay — look — now from  
the house

Of Onesiphorous come forth two men  
I oft have seen pass in and out. Make haste  
Into the street and meet these men — so may  
You talk with them and learn the ways of Paul, —  
Then soon evolve a way to punish him.  
(*Thamyris passes outside the garden and speaks  
with Demas and Hermogenes, who are just  
coming from Paul's chamber.*)

*Thamyris*

Pray tell me, men, who is among us here  
That draws increasing crowds to hear his words?

*Demas*

A man named Paul.

*Thamyris*

You call yourselves his friends?

*Hermogenes*

We travelled with him thither on the road,  
And thus we grew to know him well.

*Thamyris*

Describe

This man to me.

*Hermogenes*

He is but small in size, —

*Demas*

Yet full of agile grace and buoyant health  
With muscles that try well such strength as yours.

*Thamyris*

His face ?

*Hermogenes*

His eyebrows meet and give his face  
A grave, stern look.

*Demas*

Grave ? Stern ? To me his face  
Shows only tenderness.

*Hermogenes*

With such a nose, —  
Like some fierce hawk's, and chin as dogged as  
The emperor's ? His mouth — it seems I have  
Forgot his mouth —

*Demas*

Because of what he speaks.  
Then does he look not like a man, but pure

And radiant as some lone spirit come  
From higher sphere. He has a countenance  
Like none you know on earth.

*Hermogenes*

Have you forgot  
That he is growing bald and that he has  
A scar which twists his cheek in riveled lines  
Like impress of some hand of hate ?

*Demas*

Apart  
From him, I can remember but his eyes —  
With ever changing fire in their veiled depths.  
They have a look that holds me to him now  
As when we met him on the mountain road.

*Thamyris*

Why stay you both so long about this man ?  
They say for many moons he has been here.

*Hermogenes*

When Onesiphorous came out to meet  
Him on the Royal Road, I made to part  
Our ways, but Demas, here, the dreamer, like  
Some wide-eyed child drawn by the subtle spell  
Of story-teller's charm, was so enthralled  
By Paul's strange oracles of Christ which we

Had listened to each day and night upon  
Our journey, that he would not separate  
From him — and since the two of us have but  
One purse — and Demas carries it, we came  
Together after Paul and took the place  
Of guests in breaking bread and bending knee  
Within the house of Onesiphorous.  
There Demas soon became enamoured of  
The daughter Maia who bound up for him  
His travel-wounds, with soothing ointments poured  
Upon soft swathings. So he lingers long  
Within Iconium to voice his plea  
And win her love.

*Demas*

Hermogenes, why tell  
Our story to a stranger that but greets  
You with a passing word? In walking here  
I have let fall along the way a script  
I treasure greatly and I must retrace  
My steps. It must be near — I shall return  
In haste — so linger here.  
(*Demas departs.*)

*Hermogenes*

A pretext for  
A last good-night to Maia and to Paul.  
The two have robbed me of my comrade who  
With me has lived the wanderer's free life.  
I would be off again upon the road —  
But for my long dependence on his purse,

Curse fate that life must be lived out to clink  
Of coin — chief penalty of what men call  
A life that's civilized. I loathe the walls  
Of purse-bound houses bought and sold. I hate  
The city gates that compass men to lives  
Of narrow circling. Ah — to sleep once more  
With starlight on my face — to know again  
The freedom of the open and the wild!  
The purple of the distance lures me on —  
For somewhere there awaits a kingdom just  
For me — lay not a finger to your brow —  
There waits the kingdom of my happiness.  
For this I toil o'er lonely desert stretch  
And mountain trail — I follow beckoning  
Of each new passing sail or lambent torch  
In lifted hand. The scars you see upon  
My body tell the story of the pain  
This quest has brought to me. Sometimes my feet  
Are numb and sight is blurred — what matter, if  
I keep my dream? 'Tis this that recreates  
My life with each day's rising sun. If in  
The end I learn my long-dreamed kingdom is  
A futile quest — that nowhere blooms my land  
Of red joy-roses — then shall I make but  
One prayer unto the gods — not for the lost  
Fair kingdom of my happiness — but for  
The quick restoring of my dream — my fool's  
Rose-dream! Ah, what a night to vagabond  
With moonbeams! Yet must I stay restless here  
Within these city walls!



*Thamyris*

Good fellow, hark —  
You need not stay imprisoned here if you  
Will serve me as your friend — a friend who ties  
A fuller purse than Demas ever held.  
I need your help and have the gold to pay  
For it. I want to speak against this Paul  
Before the magistrates, because he is  
Corrupting all Iconium with words  
That undermine our social laws. Help me  
In this and all the gold you need is yours.

*Hermogenes*

'Tis easy earning of my freedom, for  
This man has robbed me of my friend.

*Thamyris*

I need your comrade Demas, too — what means  
will draw  
Him into league with us? With gold can we  
Induce your friend to speak against this man?

*Hermogenes*

He thinks that Paul can do no wrong — and gold  
Would turn him from you quicker than a spot  
Of leprosy upon your hand. There is  
But one sure course to win him to your will.  
The maiden Maia lately has become

Indifferent to Demas, for she sits  
All day with mind upon Paul's words. Not yet  
Does Demas understand the change in her,  
Although her coldness troubles him and drives  
Him pacing up and down the long night through  
In sleepless doubt. Convince him that through

Paul

His love is lost and thus you have him led  
To work with you.

*Thamyris*

Come, now, and sit with me —  
My banquet table waits — a sumptuous  
Repast.

*Hermogenes*

A change indeed from herbs, plain loaves  
And water — gladly will I come.

*Thamyris*

Persuade  
Your friend when he returns.

*Hermogenes*

'Twill not be hard —  
For Demas has a great delight in wines  
And dainties. This will help you gain your end.  
Inflame him with your wines. So long has he  
Abstained, one taste will wake to mastery

Old habit, loosely leashed. Then help me prove  
To him that Paul has robbed him of his love.  
I know him when the demon in him works —  
Paul's doom is sealed.

*Thamyris*

I hear his step — help me  
To win him to the feast.  
(*They go to meet Demas, and shortly the three pass  
laughing along the path that leads to Thamy-  
ris's abode.*)

## ACT II

*Scene I. (Just outside of the city walls of Iconium. A week has passed since the last scene. Hermogenes is trying to draw Demas back into the city.)*

*Hermogenes*

Give ear to me, —  
A fool's trail, Demas, now to follow Paul.

*Demas*

Hermogenes, the day that Paul was scourged  
And cast without these gates I woke, as one  
Whose senses have been filmed by long drug sleep,  
To what great wrong we did in lending aid  
To injure him. Since then no sun has brought  
Me peace.

*Hermogenes*

If wrong it was, how can we right  
It, now that Paul has gone, we know not where?

*Demas*

I want to see if all is well with him.  
He may be sick, — at mercy of wild beasts, —  
Or lost upon these plains. And I  
Would hear again those messages of his —  
Perhaps he has for me some word that will  
Give peace.

*Hermogenes*

From one who stole away your heart's  
Desire — the love of Maia, that fair maid ?

*Demas*

It is now plain to me, Hermogenes,  
'Twas not his fault I lost the maid — her soul  
Was far above a mate world-worn as I.  
She turned from me to hear his words as some  
Snow-lily turns from noisome dark to pure,  
Clear sunlight. Ah, if I had hearkened, too,  
And learned of him, I might not be as now  
A restless wanderer — a moving blot  
Upon the earth. I feel the fault lies in  
Myself. I was too much perverted by  
The world, — too weak, — to take as mine his  
faith,

For nature has in me implanted such  
Strong kinship with the things of flesh, that now  
My spirit has grown hard with yielding long  
To sin. So have I lost a sensitive  
Response to high appeals — I could not rise  
With him to purity. Yet would I hear  
Him speak again. Hermogenes, I feel  
That we have wronged a man that means no guile.  
As in a haze I can recall the day  
We went before the magistrate and spoke  
Against him — Paul, who had befriended us.  
Much wine inflamed me, — wine that I had drunk  
At those long feasts which Thamyras prepared

To lure us and to render us as clay  
In his revengeful hands, to shape at will.  
I heard confused, as one far off, the voice  
Of Thamyris when he cried out, "This man  
Is a magician — by his art has he  
Corrupted our Iconium. We know  
Not who he is, but he has made our maids  
Averse to marriage by his doctrine, strange  
And new, that men begin to call by name  
The Christian faith. This God he preaches is  
Not one to take a place with other gods  
In our eclectic pantheon — but to  
Destroy all other worship. All this means  
For us a social revolution here."  
Then all the multitude cried out, "Away  
With him — this bold magician Paul, away  
With this strange foreigner." The magistrate  
Was stern in words of questioning to Paul.  
"Who art thou, man? And what is this you teach?"  
Paul's voice rang out in answer quick, "I teach  
A living God, a God who stands in need  
Of nothing. He has sent me to reclaim  
Mankind from sinful flesh and death. For this  
God sent His Son in whom I teach all men  
To rest their hope, for He alone has had  
Compassion on a world led far astray.  
I teach that which has been revealed to me  
By God. Wherein do I do wrong?" Ah — then,  
Hermogenes, I knew this man knew naught  
Of subtle arts of sorcery. Truth spoke  
In that clear voice — truth that made Zeno loath  
To pass quick judgment — for he ordered that

The culprit be imprisoned for a time  
Until the magistrates could hear again  
Paul's story at their leisure. Then I felt  
A guilty sense of shame, yet I was bound  
By oath to Thamyris and wild ran fire  
Of wines within my blood. Ah, would that I  
Could but forget the look Paul gave to me  
As he was led away! I saw him as  
In mists that writhe and crawl at night in from  
The sea and grayly clutch the mountain tops.  
But dimly I remember, — yet I know  
Some hand kept hold on me and I could not  
Go after him. Hermogenes, a curse  
Upon you, if that hand was yours.

*Hermogenes*

And would  
You follow after one who soon proved true  
The accusations made against him? Ay,  
And more, for well you know that very night  
Revealed the guilty earthly love he bears  
For Thekla, the betrothed of Thamyris,  
So runs the tale. At midnight Thekla slipped  
From out her chamber. Easily she passed  
The gates that bar Paul's dreary prison-house,  
By quickly stripping bare her arms of all  
Her bracelets, carved in gold, inlaid with pearls,  
And shining jewels, rare and red, that flashed  
A rainbow world of sudden promise in  
The eyes of Sextus, keeper of the gate.  
When once within those first barred walls she  
bribed

The jailer with her mirror, cobwebbed o'er  
With threads of gold, a-dazzle here and there  
With dewlike gems that glowed a prophecy  
Of ease to him through that damp prison gloom.  
So Thekla reached Paul's cell. She wept and kissed  
His bonds—and all night long she stayed with him.  
A slave of Sextus in the street met with  
Her mother, Theokleia, in her search  
With Thamyris for Thekla, whom they feared  
Was lost. This slave informed them she had  
passed

Within the prison walls — and there at dawn  
They found her, sitting at the feet of Paul.  
The two were so enthralled that Thekla showed  
No shame, but had a look of newfound joy  
And exultation, as had Paul; and when  
They seized her foreign lover to be led  
Again before the magistrates, she threw  
Herself upon the ground where he had sat  
And there she grovelled, crying out with such  
Low moans as one who is bereft. This proves  
That Paul, who so misled her, got his due  
When he was scourged next day and cast without  
Iconium.

*Demas*

A proof? The gossip of  
The street a proof? How can we know what passed  
Behind closed doors? We did not see. Perhaps  
She sat and learned his teachings — there received  
Some special message from his lips that brought  
Her gladness. Who are we that we should judge?



As some wild reed stung by the bee will bloat  
Until it is sufficient house to hold  
Her hatch, so Thekla's deeds and words have been  
Perverted by malicious tongues, to seem  
The proofs of guilt. I have no ear for these  
Low mischief-makers, for, Hermogenes,  
I saw this maiden's eyes when Paul was scourged —  
She does not love him with a love of earth.

*Hermogenes*

Why then does she remain immovable?  
To prayers and tears of all her household? It  
Is said that all her slaves, her lovers, and  
Her parents fail to break the spell which holds  
Her in its thrall. 'Tis plain that Paul has so  
Bewitched the maid he can maintain as strong  
His power over her, though now apart.  
Her family resorted soon to much  
Severer measures, bringing Thekla to  
Appear before the chief tribunal, but  
In vain the judges threatened her at length  
With penalties. 'Tis said she would not speak  
One word in answer when they asked why thus  
She has forsaken laws so long observed  
In her Iconium, and will not yield  
To Thamyris. I heard to-day that she  
Is trying to escape from home and go  
Across these plains to follow Paul.

*Demas*

## A tale

Of idle gossipers as all the rest, —  
 Such action would indeed be proof they both  
 Deserve the censure laid upon them by  
 The people, for unless they loved and lived  
 An earthly passion, she would never go  
 To join him thus. But to believe this last  
 Maligning news of Thekla, I should have  
 To see her setting forth myself.  
*(A hooded figure passes quickly out of the gates.)*

*Hermogenes*

## Look, — look —

Upon your left! Who steals from out the gate  
 There, Demas, in that rough disguise of dress  
 But Thekla? Now will you believe in her?  
 And in the man she goes to meet? I did  
 Not think so soon to prove my words.

*Demas*

## 'Tis she!

*(With a great cry he throws himself upon the ground).*  
 O Paul — Paul — spare me this!  
*(After a long time he raises himself and watches  
 Thekla till she disappears from view.)*

*Hermogenes*

The road — the road that lies away from her  
 And him! — Help me forget. Ah, quickly come —  
 The old, free life again!

*Hermogenes*

Now speaks the friend  
I knew in days too long ago. For this  
I have been waiting, Demas. With the purse  
Which Thamyris bestowed upon me, I  
Was free to leave you days ago — but I  
Was held by memory of comradeship,  
Ah, Demas, friend — to know that life again!  
See — there upon our right the mountains rise —  
All needled sharp in silhouette against  
The sky. There lies our path.

*Demas*

Back to our world —  
Come — back again, Hermogenes! How have  
We stayed away so long?

*Scene II. (The plains stretching to the north of Iconium. Thekla, alone, pausing as the distance grows, to bid adieu to the city of her birth.)*

*Thekla*

Farewell, Iconium, my home, — my home.  
This parting from you is to me like some  
Consuming fire that tries my purity  
Of purpose. Never till this hour have I  
Known all you are to me — your native child.  
Yours the first sky I ever saw. Your vales  
So gently cradled by the long, low hills  
Have been my dreaming spirit's playground since  
My birth. Your trees have leaned above me with  
A wistful care, a tenderness, which I  
Have sought each morning of my life at dawn.  
Your breezes have blown freshly through my spring  
Of life. Your walls have been a shelter safe  
That held me in my home, — the vastness of  
This world outside half-frightens me. Within  
Your gates a household draws me by the ties  
Of blood. My heart is knitted to them by  
A mighty love. And Thamyris — I will  
Not lose my thoughts of him. He is my mate —  
This much I know — the flesh of me still yearns  
For him. I close my ears to nature's call  
And love's imperious command. Above  
My spirit's dark confusion comes a voice  
Ethereal that leads me on. It takes

Away the wish to turn and go back home.  
Farewell, Iconium. Now as the sun  
Throws amber of its setting on your gates,  
And far before me stretches growing dark,  
I give you up,— my first free sacrifice  
For my new faith.

*(She stands with hands outstretched — her gaze  
resting in last mute caress upon the distant  
city. She turns slowly and kneels, her face  
upon her hands. A figure approaches rap-  
idly and the noise of his approach rouses  
her from her long devotion. It is Thamyris.)*

*Thamyris*

The gods be praised that I have found you ere  
The sun has set. Come, Thekla, and return,  
With me.

*Thekla*

Nay, Thamyris, for I have said  
Farewell to my Iconium, — and in  
My heart to you.

*Thamyris*

Ah, not farewell — cast off  
This power that has led you here and come  
Back home.

*Thekla*

No longer is Iconium  
My home — from now I take instead the world  
Where'er my God may lead me, Thamyris.

*Thamyris*

The great, unheeding universe your home, —  
 You, Thekla, who were born for tender care?  
 What wildness this? You would be lost — the  
     world  
 Is full of cruelty. Already has  
 A change come o'er you — something softly young  
 Has vanished from your face. Come back — come  
     back —  
 You are a woman, Thekla — mine the arm  
 To guard you. Come — my arms are open to  
 My white bride-love.

*Thekla*

Nay, nay — the ambient  
 Protection of my God is round me now,  
 And shields me from all hurt.

*Thamyris*

Dissemble not —  
 You seek to cloak your love for Paul beneath  
 The guise of a religious faith. Think you  
 I do not know that you have left your home  
 To seek this man who wanders on these plains,  
 An outcast — scorned of men? You cannot say  
 You are not here to find this man —

*Thekla*

'Tis true, —  
 I search for Paul, — but only that he may  
 Give unto me the seal baptismal — then  
 Temptation shall not touch me in the world.  
 I swear I have no love of earth for Paul.

*Thamyris*

Ah, Thekla — wound me not with lie on lie —  
To give you up is all too hard without  
This weak attempt at craft which only proves  
Your sin the clearer to me now.

*Thekla*

I can

Not hope that you will understand. There is  
But one just critic of my words and deeds —  
But one clear-eyed spectator of my life —  
My true ideal self — the God in me.  
To stand before the searching of this self,  
With spirit white and unashamed, — this is  
My one desire. I have no real concern  
About my life in eyes of men — there is  
No sting in adverse criticism now.  
I have been called by God to sacrifice  
My home and you — my earthly mate — and go  
To teach His words, to heal alike the souls  
And bodies of mankind.

*Thamyris*

And you believe  
This foolish doctrine of the foreigner —  
That it is wrong to yield to earthly love ?

*Thekla*

Paul did not teach such doctrine, Thamyris.  
His words were much perverted by the ones

Who sought to do him ill. He did but say  
That earthly ties keep mortals tethered to  
The flesh, and so prevent the work that some  
Are called to do. He did not teach that sin  
Is in the marriage vows. For some God means  
Such vows shall be. But not for me, for I  
Must be unhampered in my work.

*Thamyris*

Ah what  
A life for you, my Thekla! What return  
Hope you to gain? Not so does mortal win  
The world's applause.

*Thekla*

The love of human praise  
Does not inspire the high endeavor which  
Exacts man's sacrifice. But one reward  
I ask — the sacred, humble rapture one  
May know, who, blindly giving, learns at last  
His gift has carried joy. Dissuade me not  
Nor hold me back from those who have great need  
Of me — more need than you.

*Thamyris*

Ah, Thekla, love,  
But give yourself to me, and I will be  
Your slave to do your will. I shall not speak  
One word against the course you take.

W. H. U.



*Thekla*

And still  
You cannot understand. Can you not see  
My work must be my all?

*Thamyris*

(*Wildly.*)  
It shall not be, —  
I will not let you go from me — for you  
Belong to me by all the rights of what  
Men call affinity. So much I love  
You, Thekla, that there is no power strong  
Enough to part you from me. I demand  
My own — I force you now to yield to me.  
(*He seeks to take her in his arms.*)

*Thekla*

'Tis futile to defy divinity.  
(*She lifts her face and slowly makes the sign of the cross.*)  
O God — thy help!  
(*A flame, a divine fire encircles and protects her. Thamyris stands back in great awe — at last comprehending. He is drawn to his knees before her. She lays her hands upon his head in blessing and goes on her way.*)

*Scene III. (A cave farther on towards the mountains, where Paul with the family of Onesiphorous, who followed him out of Iconium, have paused upon their journey to fast and pray for Thekla. A slave of Onesiphorous, going out for herbs, meets Thekla and brings her to the cave. There is great rejoicing at the sight of her.)*

*Paul*

O God, I thank Thee that so soon Thou hast  
Heard prayer and guided Thekla thither to  
Us here unharmed. Thou who dost understand  
Men's joy as well as sadness, share with us  
In our rejoicing over her, as we  
Now break our fast.  
*(The slaves bring loaves, herbs, berries, and water,  
and there is feasting and great joy.)*

*Thekla*

I have decided to go forth for Him,  
The Master, you revealed to me — and do  
His will for all my life, wherever He  
May lead.

*Paul*

It is a shameless age and you  
Are very beautiful. I fear you will  
Be overpowered by the manifold  
Temptations of the world.

*Thekla*

But give me now  
The seal baptismal, then shall I have naught  
To fear. Then shall I part from you and go  
Alone to Antioch.

*Paul*

Go, sleep in peace.  
At dawn to-morrow you shall be baptized.

*(The next morning at sunrise Lectra bathes Thekla and anoints her body with sweet-smelling oils, unbinds her hair and twines about her head a chaplet of bittersweet. The stone altar set up under the bay tree is adorned with myrtle. A fire of pine cones is lighted beneath the cross of ilex-wood. Water is brought and purified. Paul sprinkles Thekla and she is consecrated by her vows.)*

*Paul*

Now are you sanctified and saved by this  
Baptizing into Christ — this holy seal  
And sacrament that opens to you wide  
The realm of grace. Go, in the name of God,  
The blessed Trinity, and heal mankind.

*(He blesses her and binds her sandals on her feet.  
Thekla goes forth as one glorified upon her  
journey to Antioch.)*

### ACT III

*Scene I. (The gates of Antioch. Many people are passing in and out, as it is the occasion of a great festival which, with its Roman venatio, the exhibition of wild beasts, is an unusual event in a provincial city like Antioch, not the capital of the province. The festival is of a political character, — it is a part of the government scheme for the romanization of southern Galatia. The governor Castelius, is visiting Antioch that the event may be made as imposing as possible. All the important personages in Galatic Phrygia have come to pay their respects to Castelius and to the imperial power of Claudius, whom the governor represents. With the rest, Queen Tryphaena has come to Antioch from her private estates beside Loadiceia on the Lycus, where she has lived a life of seclusion since her quarrel with her son, King Polemon. Alexander, the agonothetes, or president of the festival, and high priest of the Galatic province, with his great train of attendants in holiday attire, is passing the gates on his way to the festival. He sees Thekla entering Antioch, and he is at once struck with her great beauty. A young woman unaccompanied in the street of an eastern town, she is mistaken for a dancing girl. As such, Alexander addresses her — an act of gallantry and honor from one of his rank to a person of the class to which he supposes she belongs.)*

*Alexander*

*(Greatly enamoured of Thekla at first sight stops his train of attendants to speak to her.)*

Who art you, maid? What name is yours? You  
are

Most fair. Your flesh that shows itself between  
The parting of coarse garmenting is like  
The pink-white sheen of pearl — and luring-curved,  
Your red lips chalice nectar sweet that will  
Intoxicate my senses like bouquet  
Of mellowed wine. Your eyes — why, maid, the  
do

Belie your lips. A pretty trick — upon  
My word, — dissembling artful! Like some saint  
You veil your eyes then with uplifting quick  
Your wistful gaze seeks sanctuary in  
The sky. Come, maid, with me and show your  
grace  
In some lithe dance to quickstrung music's spell.

*Thekla*

*(Invoking the right of a stranger and a guest according to ancient custom.)*

I claim the stranger's right. Molest me not.  
I am no dancing girl, but daughter of  
A noble house.

*Alexander*

*(Laughing.)*

A noble house! Where dwells  
This royal family? Within the walls  
Of castle Nowhere, maid?

*Thekla*

My home was in  
Iconium.

*Alexander*

*Was, maid? Why are you here?*

*(Thekla is silent.)*

Speak on,— I love the silver of your voice.  
It is like purling cadence from the fount  
That nightly lulls me to my dreams. Speak, maid.

*Thekla*

I am the servant of my God. I come  
To teach His words and heal the sick.

*Alexander*

What new  
Religion this, to win so fair, so young  
A devotee? Come, feign no more — yield me  
Your lips.  
*(He tries to embrace her. Thekla resists him with  
all her supple strength. The attendants  
laugh and clap their hands.)*

*Polybius*

*(An attendant.)*

Behold our Alexander try  
His strength against a dancing girl!

*Posides**(Attendant.)*

Well does

She know the art of wrestling. See her turn  
His arm this way and that. Methinks he will  
Fight hard to win his kiss.

*Alexander*

You crafty child —

You wake the eagerness for sweet, hard won.  
Your breath is like arbutus 'neath damp leaves.

*Thekla**(Struggling with new strength.)*

And you would so disgrace a stranger here  
Before this gaping crowd? Where is your strength?

*(She tears his royal dress.)*

A crown upon your head? Into the dust  
With it!

*(She pulls Alexander's crown from his head and  
throws it on the ground. He is forced to  
let Thekla free.)*

*The attendants and other onlookers cry out,  
the onlookers in merriment at Alexander's  
ludicrous appearance, — the attendants in  
indignation at Thekla's sacrilege in thus  
assaulting Alexander and desecrating his  
official, priestly dress.)*

*Attendants*

Base sacrilege!\* Away with this strange maid!  
She tears his chlamys. Strikes his crown to earth!  
Take her before the governor — he sits  
Within the stadium in his high place  
Of office waiting for the festival.

*(Alexander enraged at being a laughing-stock before the people, and baffled in his purpose, has her seized and led forthwith before Castelius, in before the whole assembled people, where she is tried for sacrilege. Thekla makes no denial of the charges. She has assaulted a high priest while wearing his sacred official dress. The offense is proved by the admission of the accused, as was customary. Castelius determined to make a severe example of the case, in order to bring home to all minds the terror and strength of Roman authority. He condemns her to be exposed to the wild beasts which Alexander has arranged to have exhibited on one of the days of the festival. Such a sentence is new to the country, where Roman customs are just coming into use. The whole multitude is astonished and divided in approving the sentence. The women protest actively and sympathize with Thekla. Such sympathy would be impossible if they thought her to be a "Christian." The name*

\* This offense was a sacrilege, and as such was in the category of dangerous crimes which it was the governor's duty to punish.



means nothing, as later, when Christianity is proscribed by the imperial authority and the mere name "Christian" is sufficient to arouse antagonism. As yet the word has no more significance than any name applied to a devotee of one of the numerous religions. They believe Thekla to be a follower of some new faith, bound by unusual conditions, to fulfill the law of purity. The difference in her from other types does not concern them—they consider that a matter between "the God" she worships and herself. Castelius is somewhat affected by the general sympathy, but does not alter his sentence. Preliminary to the execution of her sentence, Thekla is at once made to take a part in the procession—the opening ceremony of the games. She is placed on top of the cage of a fierce lioness, and in this position, with a tablet inscribed "Sacrilegious" placed beside her, Thekla is exhibited in the arena.)

*Polybius*

Behold, the lioness protrudes her tongue  
Between the bars and licks the maiden's feet!

*Posides*

Look on her face, Polybius,— as some  
Lost lamb looks round the wilderness to find  
The shepherd, so she gazes on the crowd  
Who stare at her.

*Women*

How impious this law  
That does condemn this maid!  
(*The onlookers follow after Thekla and throw before  
her path numerous flowers and plants sig-  
nificant of the varying sentiment concerning  
her.*)

*First Noble*

(*Throwing citron.*)  
This citron for ill-natured beauty who  
Knew not the honor Alexander gave.

*First Woman*

(*Catching the citron in midair, and throwing  
amaryllis.*)  
You dog! To throw such plant before this maid!  
I strew her path with amaryllis, which  
Means beautiful timidity.

*Second Noble*

I fling  
Ranunculus, for I am dazzled by  
Her charms.

*Third Noble*

And I bring southernwood for this  
Strange jest our Alexander makes.

*Polybius*

Much more  
Appropriate, sharp xanthium, coarse toothed  
With prickly burrs, for rudeness to our priest.

*Second Woman*

Fool, stay your hand. I throw the yellow bloom  
Of coltsfoot — justice shall be done.

*Third Woman*

And I —  
The cistus evergreen, which shows to her  
The favor of the populace.

*Posides*

Look — here  
The amaranth for base pretense.

*Fourth Noble*

I throw  
The marjoram for blushes which are not  
Upon her cheek.

*Fourth Woman*

A red camellia  
For unpretending excellence.

## THEKLA

*Fifth Woman*

And here  
The elder for compassion deep.

*Fifth Noble*

A bit  
Of sweet hibiscus for her delicate  
Young beauty's grace.

*Sixth Woman*

The mint for virtue pure.

*Sixth Noble*

A very large and spreading piece of larch  
For her audacity.

*Seventh Woman*

The cyclamen  
For sweet submission to the law.

*Queen Tryphaena*

*(Stepping forth and casting her rubies in the path.)*

I cry  
For charity to this sweet maid — for this  
I fling my rubies down. Let end this show,  
Castelius. You have brought down the wrath

Of Queen Tryphaena on your head. Recall  
That I am cousin to the emperor.

I ask that this sweet maid be granted now  
The privilege reserved for criminals  
Of higher rank, of being kept within  
A private house instead of prison walls  
Until the day that you have set for her  
To die.\* Thus till her death may she fulfill  
Her service to her God of purity.

*(Cries of approval from all the women.)*

Let hers not be the fate, the daughter of  
Sejanus suffered at the hands of her  
Inhuman jailer. Let sweet Thekla go  
With me and stay within my home until  
You summon her. I am alone — I have  
No daughter of my own — for years ago  
My Falconilla died. My three sons — kings  
In rank — have not proved true to me. Grant my  
Old age the sweet companionship of one  
So like my child.

*Castelius*

I grant you care of this  
Young prisoner. Full well you know the law —  
The penalty pronounced on her will be,  
In turn, your fate if she escapes while in  
Your care. To-morrow I shall send for her.

*(Queen Tryphaena leads Thekla away to the house  
which is the Queen's temporary dwelling while  
in Antioch.)*

\* This kind of imprisonment (*custodia libera privata*)  
was common. A guarantee (*fide-jussor*) was required. The  
guard in charge was liable to the fate of the prisoner if  
allowed to escape.

*Scene II. (The arena; the day of the venatio and Thekla's exposure to the wild beasts. During the night Queen Tryphaena's daughter has appeared to her in a dream, bidding her to befriend Thekla, and take her as a newfound daughter. When morning comes, Alexander appears with other high officials, to require Thekla's appearance in the arena. Queen Tryphaena refuses to let Thekla go until Castelius sends soldiers. Weeping bitterly, she then follows Thekla to the arena. Here the crowd is assembled in an uproar of excitement. Thekla is led within the arena and exposed nude except for a cincture. The women cry out wildly and throw sweet-smelling herbs, nard, cassia, amomum, and many perfumes about her in the arena.)*

### *The Women*

Ah, cruel sight! An evil sentence is  
Upon this maid!

Ah, see! The beasts in chains!

### *Queen Tryphaena*

*(Crying out.)*

My daughter Falconilla I have laid  
Within the tomb — and now must I see thee,  
My Thekla, newly found, torn by these beasts!

*Posides and others*

Away, with this strange sacrilegious maid!  
Bring scorn upon her God who fails her now!  
Great is our Artemis! Away with this  
Religion new!

*(Thekla stands with her arms outstretched in the  
attitude of the cross, and lifts her face to  
heaven.)*

*Thekla*

My Lord, my God! Thou art  
Companion of the persecuted — hear  
My prayer! Behold thy handmaid in this hour,  
For lo, the shame of woman is in me  
Uncovered in the midst of all this crowd.  
Remember me, O God, in this dark hour!  
*(A shining mist descends and veils her nakedness.)*

*Polybius*

Is there some film upon my eyesight? Look  
Posides, can you see the maiden's form?  
She seems to me all veiled in shining mist.

*Posides*

So does she look to me.  
*(The people murmur in astonishment.)*

*Queen Tryphaena*

The lioness is loosed within the pit!  
(*The women weep and turn away.*)

*Alexander**Castelius!*

Behold the lioness approach the maid  
And fawn about her feet! It acts as if  
It knew and loved her! Look! How can this  
    maid  
Be so acquainted with this jungle beast?  
What are these tales one hears of sympathy  
Between a fearless soul and savage beast?  
See — now she lays her hand upon its head!

*Castelius*

'Twould seem some subtle power tames the beast!  
(*The people are spellbound. Castelius orders the  
    bear to be brought in.*)

*The Women*

May Thekla's God not fail her now!

*Posides*

See how  
The bear looks Thekla o'er — now will she die!



*Polybius*

The lioness has roused from Thekla's feet!  
Look, now the bear advances for a lunge  
Upon the maid!

*Queen Tryphaena*

The bear springs straight upon  
The maid! The lioness attacks the bear!

*The Women*

Ah, bloody conflict. See — the angry bear  
Now slays the lioness!

*Queen Tryphaena*

Nay, nay — look once  
Again — the lioness has turned as if  
Imbued with strength anew. Now — now the  
bear  
Is down. I hear its dying cry!

*Alexander*

Now bring  
The panther in. It has not had its food  
For days. We must make end of this, for there  
Are other sports to come.  
(*The panther is unchained and loosed within the  
arena.*)

*The Women*

Lo, even this  
Wild beast does not devour her. See — it draws  
Apart and stands as if enthralled by some  
Strange power in her eyes. The lioness  
Is at her feet again like some tame pet!

*Alexander*

It seems we must devise some other means  
To kill this maid. No beast has touched her yet.  
I have two bulls — let her be bound between  
Them by her feet. Then shall the creatures be  
Pressed on by goads of red-hot iron. What say  
You to this plan, Castelius?

*Castelius*

*(Looking gloomily away from the arena and speaking  
reluctantly.)*

Do what

You will.

*(The lioness is led away. The bulls are brought  
and Thekla bound between them. The red-  
hot irons are brought.)*

*Queen Tryphaena*

Farewell, my daughter, — now, the end!  
*(She gives a great cry and faints beside the abaci.  
The crowd parts in dismay.)*